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Complicity and Memory in Soldiers' Testimonies of the Algerian War of Decolonisation in *Esprit* and *Les Temps modernes*

In March 1962 Jean-Marie Domenach, director of the French journal *Esprit*, upbraided his counterpart at *Les Temps modernes*, Jean-Paul Sartre, in a review of his famous introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. 'Apparently for Sartre there is no middle situation... The greyness of most human actions gives way to an exultant light,' he charged. 'Yet, in human conflicts there are transition zones, knots of complicity [*connivence*]' (Domenach, 1962: 458–459).

Concern for the complexity of complicity was also apparent in the *Les Temps modernes* fold, however. Simone de Beauvoir, a member of its editorial board, characterised her commitment precisely in those terms: 'I wanted to stop being an accomplice in this war'. And it was the complicity, both in the form of violence of French troops and of the habituation or indifference of the broader French public, that she termed a 'tetanus of the imagination'. Strikingly, she suggested that a means of countering this affliction of getting used to the unconscionable – from which, she conceded, she herself suffered – were testimonies of soldiers returning from Algeria in both *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit* (de Beauvoir, 1965: 369, 366, 367).ⁱ

This article examines this mutual concern for the complexities of complicity, and investigates its relationship to memory through the curious importance de Beauvoir placed on such testimonies in these two journals. I suggest that this concern corresponds closely to Debarati Sanyal's own investigation of complicity. Her reading highlights its etymological root to understand it not only as participation or collaboration in wrongdoing, but also an engagement with the complexity of the world we inhabit (Sanyal, 2015: 1). In this view, solidarity and complicity are two sides of the same coin. Similarly, in the two journals' concern

with generalised French complicity through indifference or passivity, solidarity is to complicity what imagination is to the, as it were, de-imagination that de Beauvoir flagged up. Imagination here implied, above all, activated memory and the capacity to react appropriately to what was done in one's name.

But solidarity meant different things for the two journals, which raises the question of selection criteria alluded to in de Beauvoir's remark – which one can surmise applied equally to *Esprit* – that for each one *Les Temps modernes* published they received ten (de Beauvoir, 1965: 367). In fact, whilst the testimonies in both outlets overlapped considerably in style and themes, one can detect a slight preponderance of analogies with Nazism in testimonies published in *Les Temps modernes*, whereas *Esprit* edged its rival in publishing testimonies which tracked complex institutional or systemic bases underpinning complicity with violence. This can be indexed to differing conceptions of appropriate action against the war, notably in terms of the nature and extent of support for Algerian nationalism and the FLN and the question of French troop desertion.

My first claim picks up on James Le Sueur's (2001) argument that French decolonisation involved profound questions of intellectual legitimacy, and challenged French intellectuals to define and rethink conceptions of France and French values, particularly in relation to its 'other'. I suggest that examination of the publication of these testimonies offers a useful supplement to his research, in that it raises the issue not only of the kinds of questions intellectuals raised, but also how they did so, and how they garnered authority to do so effectively. Relatedly, and secondly, invocations of memory of the Second World War in these testimonies, including of fascism and Nazism, were not simply hyperbole. Rather, they were serviceable to the two journals' aim of waking French opinion since they contributed to a powerful, intricate portrayal of a threefold crisis: in Algeria, of French youth, and, by extension,

of the French Republic itself. And third, I examine how these testimonies adumbrated ideas about the bases of complicity for both the French soldier in Algeria and French society as a whole, of which he was commonly held to be representative. With various caveats, I suggest connections between, in Domenach's terms, the greyness of complicity outlined in these testimonies and ideas about the grey zone of Vichy in later decades to refer to the murky area in between victims and perpetrators.ⁱⁱ Here I identify one source of the emergence of a trope of complicity memory. In doing so, I propose that these testimonies qualify or nuance scholarly judgements about the reworking of the memory of the Second World War during the Algerian war, notably by Henry Rousso, Donald Reid and Christoph Kalter.

The Algerian War of Decolonisation and the French Intellectual Battle

The Algerian war – only officially recognised as a war in France in 1999 – extended from 1954 through the escalation of the conflict by Guy Mollet's socialist government from 1956, the toppling of the Fourth Republic and General de Gaulle's assumption of the Presidency in 1958, to its conclusion in 1962. Colonised from 1830, Algerian society was rigidly polarised between *pied-noirs* European settlers and the majority indigenous Algerians. The conflict gave rise to notorious violence both on the part of the Algerian Front de libération nationale (FLN) and the French military. The violence of the latter, especially because of its use of torture, gave rise to a whole infrastructure of dissent. This targeted the government and its system of censorship, state TV and other media supportive of the cause of French Algeria, but also an institutionalised left in Mollet's SFIO and the French Communist Party, which appeared gravely lacking at this historic moment. In this way, the war was brought into question in different forms and degrees, ranging from critique of methods to a more thoroughgoing

interrogation of French colonialism per se. Means varied from exposés and editorials to publication of testimonies or letters from participants, including such notable examples as General de la Bollardière's sensational letter published in *L'Express* in March 1957, which lent his resistance credentials to the condemnation of current French military repression; or the publication in February 1958, quickly banned, of French-Algerian journalist Henri Alleg's *La Question*. Smuggled out of prison and published by Editions de Minuit – set up as a Resistance institution under the Occupation – Alleg's account of his torture by French paratroopers made a strong impact on the French public. His untypical case as a European subjected to this treatment posed questions of historical responsibility and complicity; as did his Communist affiliations – one of his torturers even admiringly recounted stories he had heard about the bravery of Communist resisters holding out through torture under the Nazi Occupation.

There were significant similarities between *Esprit* and *Les Temps modernes*. Both were strongly anchored in the experience of the Occupation during the Second World War. Yet, the overarching application of the leftist label to the two journals obscures as much as it clarifies. Recent scholarship has reiterated the limits of such designations; Darcie Fontaine's important recent work, *Decolonizing Christianity*, for instance, draws out the multi-layered complexities of anti-colonialism as a body of thought and action in France and Algeria during decolonisation. This insight suggests itself to this discussion as *Esprit* was the principle outlet of Christian personalism and, following the Liberation of France, aligned itself with left politics, but as a perceived strengthening, rather than dilution of, its Christian commitment. *Les Temps modernes'* origins were even more visibly rooted in the French experience of the Second World War, appearing first in October 1945, and expressly launched in the Resistance spirit of forging a new society out of the old. It was closely associated with Jean-Paul Sartre, but also included on its board diverse intellectual luminaries before Cold War fractures led to a narrowing of editorial perspectives, certainly in comparison with *Esprit*.

This conjuncture of the Liberation led into overt and strong political commitment and an anti-colonial orientation in the two journals, first with respect to France's war in Indochina, and then the Algerian war, during which they were early and strong advocates of negotiation (da Silva, 1991: 276–277, 286). The two outlets both enjoyed a political and intellectual reach disproportionate to modest circulation figures of around 10,000 (Christofferson, 2004: 77n40). By comparison, *Paris-Match* – whose focus on FLN violence occupied central terrain in the contest over the representation of the war – had an average print run of around one and half million as of September 1955 (Kuby, 2011: 327). However, government targeting, including censorship and seizure, of outlets like these two journals, and the contempt which the French military voiced against them, are suggestive of their perceived leverage over key sections of opinion. Likewise, the military's preoccupation with such critical outlets was indicated by explicit instructions to soldiers not to speak out on their return lest they fuel critical intellectuals or Communists, and those who did so while still on service faced punishment (Narayanan, 2016: 54).

Important differences existed between the two journals, however, which bore on their respective use of soldiers' testimonies. First, their common roots in the spirit of the Resistance and Liberation resonated differently. Whereas for *Esprit*, the Resistance represented patriotic sentiment, for *Les Temps modernes* it was foremost a combat against fascism in all its hues (da Silva, 1991: 313). The publication of testimonies from 1957 corresponded to turning points for both journals, in large part coming out of the aftermath of the Soviet crushing of the Budapest uprising in October-November 1956, but also in the case of *Esprit* overlapping with the rise of a new generation at the outlet. *Les Temps modernes* put critical distance between itself and the Soviet Union, shifting its horizons and hopes to an internationalist socialism whose orientation in the Third World might overcome its Stalinist disappointments in Europe. At *Esprit*, Domenach determined the moment to be opportune for a return to reflection and questioning

of easy syntheses, Manichean conceptions of capitalism, totalising systems, philosophies of history, and political ideologies (da Silva, 1991: 301–302).

In considering variations between the testimonies published in the two journals, then, it is important to bear in mind that these backgrounds translated into differing conceptions of solidarity and action as the stakes of awakened imagination and memory. *Les Temps modernes*, for instance, was much more unequivocally of the view that anti-colonialism presupposed Algerian independence, hostility to de Gaulle's government, the appropriateness of troop desertion and refusal of conscription, and of support for the FLN (which came to a head over the discovery and 1960 trial of the *porteurs de valises* – French men and women who aided the FLN).

Soldiers' Testimonies

The importance de Beauvoir put on soldiers' testimonies contrasted with their relative rareness; no more than around fifteen individual testimonies or collections of testimonies appeared in *Esprit*, and fewer still in *Les Temps modernes*. These were supplemented by reviews or commentaries on testimonies published elsewhere. Letters from soldiers were also prominent, fulfilling the same testimonial function in truncated form. No testimonies appeared in either journal before 1957, at which point their use peaked through to 1958, overlapping with but by no means all deriving from the Battle of Algiers, in which the brutal but pyrrhic French victory was so famously represented in Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 eponymous film. Their publication thereafter continued less frequently through to 1962. Some testimonies were anonymous, others were named but have left no other significant historical trace, so that it is

difficult to draw conclusions about the priorities and attitudes of the author. However, unless heavily edited, they were obviously penned by soldiers with significant cultural capital. Others were by veterans who were or became well-known anti-colonial militants, notably Georges Mattéi and Robert Bonnaud, or intellectuals like Jean-François Steiner (1962).ⁱⁱⁱ

This raises the question of the supposed representativeness of the accounts. Some of the most important lines dividing the French army in North Africa were social and intellectual, between those who had benefitted from education and brought political experience and moral conviction, and those on the other hand whose literacy and political culture were limited (Narayanan, 2016: 44). Marked political savvy or cultural sophistication distinguishes many of these testimonies from those examined in core works on veterans from Algeria, such as Claire Mauss-Copeaux's oral history, which argues that 'the history and collective memory specific to a region, more than the colonialist culture of the era, structured individual memories and figured in representations of the Algerian War' (Mauss-Copeaux, 1998: 281). Jean-Charles Jauffret's (2011) study of conscripts in Algeria, on the other hand, focuses on veterans' memories in the 1980s and 1990s, which differ from the sense of political immediacy characteristic of the testimonies in these two journals. Similarly, the time lapse between the war and the interviews with French supporters of the FLN gives the accounts of Martin Evans' (1997) interviewees a reflective quality that contrasts with the testimonies in these journals. Whereas the former draws out fascinating material on formative influences, including the private realm of family background, these testimonies by contrast generally focused much more on the political immediacy of current events.

The concentration of testimonies around 1957-1958 derived in the first instance from the fact that the first conscripts only returned then, as well as an upsurge in outrage that the socialist Mollet government had escalated the war and increased conscript numbers

accordingly, and the concentration and exposure of French counter-insurgency in the Battle of Algiers. Tellingly, *Les Temps modernes* included soldiers' testimonies in its indictment of Mollet, 'He disgraces the name of socialism', in its June 1957 edition (Anon, 1957).^{iv} The decline in printed testimonies thereafter might also be explained by Oliver Todd's assertion in his own testimony (1958) that protests of all kinds by soldiers were diminishing by 1958 due to a sense of resignation and passive acceptance that paralleled public opinion generally. They complain but no longer demonstrate, he lamented (p. 829). Narayanan reminds us that it is important to factor in the change in outlook of conscripts mobilised in 1961 or 1962 compared with those in 1956 to 1958. The former had years to observe the evolution of the war and declining support in metropolitan France, while those mobilised earlier had few political opinions to frame their service (Narayanan, 2016: 50). And crucially, Emma Kuby (2011) suggests that faith in the power of testimonies started to wane later in the war, so that editorial energies were shifted to rethinking appropriate forms of anti-colonial action. In turn, the increasing subscription of the left to the reworked narrative of 'the invention of decolonization', culminating in 1962, rendered testimonies less urgent or valuable than interventions specifically promoting negotiation and cessation of hostilities (Shepard, 2006).

Similarly, the greater questioning of the moral authority of soldiers as the war dragged on may have rendered their testimonies less useful, or at least less shocking (Narayanan, 2016: 91). Notwithstanding, the mobilisation of these resources in these two journals might be likened to Michel de Certeau's concept of *détournement* – a hijacking or diversion of the prestige accorded to soldiers in order to throw into relief and raise critical consciousness of precisely what the French army was doing. The use of such testimonies, then, was comparable to the polemic form, not only purporting to describe the world but also intervening in it to change it. Unlike the polemic, however, their authority as texts derived not from the forcefulness of prose but from the presumed veracity and respect accorded to their first-hand testimony.^v This

underlay the perceived clout of the soldier's message to cut through the complicity through passivity or indifference of a French public inattentive to what was being done in its name. That so many were personally involved via the system of conscription (Branche, 2001: 145) (Dosse, 2012: 132) was an additional advantage of the soldier's testimony – not only to inform French people but to induce it to react appropriately to the information it did receive. Tellingly, Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1986) recalled that public debates about the war made little impact on public opinion in France until the emergence of the testimonies of the first returnee soldiers (p. 14).

Conveying Crisis through Memory

Despite the different lines of *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit*, the testimonies published in their pages converged in the proposition that the Algerian war was incubating a three-pronged crisis for France: first, within Algeria itself; second, of French youth; and by extension, third, at the heart of France itself. The language of memory of the Second World War was often used to this end of critiquing the French government's campaign of 'pacification' in Algeria. Yet, there was also a distinct irony in the use of the memory of the Second World War to prise open a perceived indifference that was in large part a reaction to the memory of the hardship of that time (Stora, 1998: 72). As we will see, this linkage between ordinary life and violence or domination was to re-emerge in thinking about the grey zone of Vichy in later years.

Memory of the War, both that of the Resistance and of fascism, was a highly prized and contested symbolic resource in discourse around the Algerian conflict. Its ubiquitous invocation can be traced to the splintering of the broad anti-fascist front after 1945 and the

contestation for its symbolic patrimony at a particularly polarised moment, characterised by the double fractures of the Cold War and North and South divide (Connelly, 2002). Demonstrating the crowdedness of the discursive terrain on which the two journals pitched their message, Evans has shown how the memory of the Resistance was the central reference point for most *porteurs de valises*. For his part, Kalter (2016) points to the memory of the Resistance as a symbolic resource; the analogy with fascism to condemn France's war was a lowest common denominator of otherwise variegated or opposing sections of the broader Left (pp. 150, 145). Conversely, not only de Gaulle, but figures like former governor-general of Algeria, Jacques Soustelle, and one-time Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, Georges Bidault staked their die-hard defence of French Algeria precisely on their own Resistance credentials. The *Organisation armée secrete* (OAS), which launched attacks both in Algeria and in the French mainland in opposition to independence, also laid claim to this memory, despite its widespread denunciation as fascist. Comparing de Gaulle's talks with the FLN to Pétain's accommodation of the Third Reich, it considered itself the sole legitimate heir of the Resistance (Kalter, 2016: 155). Algerian nationalists, too, sometimes invoked the language of the Resistance in accordance with the narrative of 'two Frances' rather than a single France demanding wholesale rejection. A striking instance was FLN leader Larbi Ben M'Hidi's singing of the Resistance song, the Chant des Partisans, whilst in French custody (Kalter, 2016: 114, 114n48).

Ubiquity of invocations of the Resistance or fascism should not be confused with indiscriminate use, however. Although there were instances of comparisons of Algerian nationalist with the Nazis, its employment was more muted than it was, for instance, in the aftermath of the 1945 Sétif repression. Olivier Wieviorka (2012) locates the subsidence of the Nazi parallelism with the FLN around 1956. In the wake of defeat in Indochina, French officers chose to 'brandish the spectre of subversive and revolutionary warfare rather than waving the

scarecrow of Nazism' (p. 86).

In such a crowded discursive field, making claims based on the memory of the Second World War could easily lapse into cliché or be counter-productive – Rouso points to kind of rhetorical overreaching in the game of historical analogies which had the effect of instilling weariness among sections of the French public. Harnessing the authority of soldiers' testimony, however, offered a point of distinction from the competition. This was all the more important given that the journals' editorial staff were well aware that their positions in and of themselves were prone to being perceived as speaking to the like-minded (Domenach, 1957: 303–304).

How, then, did testimonies in these journals point to this three-pronged crisis? Domenach set something of the tone for linking memory to activating French public imagination to this perceived malaise in his review of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's much-publicised 1957 memoir of military service. Recognising the vacancy that imagination needed to fill, he remarked: 'Nothing is more difficult to make real than reality.' It was precisely historical analogy that he mobilised for the task, comparing French illusions with the magnitude of the crisis with those of 1939-1940 (Domenach, 1957: 301–303). A further striking example emphasising to metropolitan audiences the scale of the first level of crisis – the degeneracy of the Algerian war itself – was Jean-Luc Tahon's (1958) account in the May-June 1958 edition of *Les Temps modernes*. He described how inside an army lorry 'six Algeria peasants discovered another face of France.' Describing the sound of the ensuing abuse and cries, he recalled that, 'it was as if at that moment, I again saw the body of a comrade tortured by the Germans in 1944' (p. 2099).

Highlighting this crisis in Algeria by using explicit references to Nazism to indict France was more apparent in testimonies in *Les Temps modernes* than those in *Esprit*.^{vi} This distinction between the journals can be explained by the need of the former, given its more controversial stance in uncompromisingly advocating Algerian independence, for testimonies

whose rhetoric conveyed correspondingly sufficient crisis and urgency to sanction such a position. Not that this language was absent from *Esprit*, as shown by Robert Bonnaud's (1957a) appeal to readers of the June 1957 edition by asking them to imagine what their reaction would be to four million Germans occupying France and carrying out horrific violence against its inhabitants (pp. 1005–1006). But accounts like Jacques Pucheu's (1957) 'Un an dans l'Aurès' in September 1957 were more typical of *Les Temps modernes*: 'the war that we were fighting was not a war to liberate the homeland or for the defence of France like those of previous generations.' He found that, 'repression against men who are aiming to win their dignity can of necessity only be of the SS variety' (pp. 447, 446).

A recurring claim, which in the post-war world inexorably referred to the memory of Nazism, was that of the treatment of indigenous Algerians as sub-humans. One such instance is the account included in the June 1960 edition of *Les Temps modernes*, 'Soldat en Algérie'. Bruno R. B.- (1960) catalogued the extent of pillage, torture, rape and violence undertaken against the local populace.^{vii} He assessed that what he most needed to testify to was 'a certain state of mind of the army, at least in operational units [...] considering everything Arab, almost by definition, not as an enemy, because in spite of everything one respects an enemy, but as a member of an inferior race. We were very nearly in the state of mind that the Nazis must have had with regard to Jews, the theory of the chosen race' (p. 1835). The very universalism of the French Republic that was supposed to have radically distinguished France from German barbarism was thrown into question. The phrasing of 'the Nazis must have had' is also interesting in its tentativeness. It suggests a certain strenuous and ongoing labour to understand, indeed to imagine, the Other. We will return below to the testimonies' perceptions of the attenuation of exactly this capacity within the institutional structures of the French army.

A striking instance of concern to highlight the poisonous effect of the Algerian campaign by reference to the memory of the German Occupation and Second World War was

Louis Renaux's (1957) 'Volontaire pour l'Algérie', where he referred to French Jewish soldiers who expressed a desire to destroy this race of Algerian Arabs, as well as other references to desired genocide (p. 558). Likewise, Pucheu (1957) mentioned officers' advocacy of genocide of the indigenous Algerians (p. 444), while Tahon's (1958) testimony in *Les Temps modernes* in May 1958 referred to *pieds noirs* stumping for this same idea (p. 2098). However, comparisons with fascism or Nazism were applied far more in the context of recollecting torture or arbitrary violence against the local population than through references to genocide. Likewise, the detention camps used to intern Algerians received little if any mention despite their obvious serviceability for historical analogy.

Signalling the crisis in Algeria did not preclude invoking the memory of the Second World War positively, however. If Jean Pouillon (1957), reviewing former résistant Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie* in *Les Temps modernes*, saw the merit of the work as contributing to conveying the danger of fascism in France, Domenach (1957) drew a different lesson in his review of the same work in *Esprit*. He, too, utilised analogies with the Second World War to point to the Algerian quagmire, but also to restore French pride. He highlighted how the testimony showed that French military conduct was preparing the classic conditions for disaster; nonetheless, he viewed the critical forthrightness of Servan-Schreiber's book as in a sense redeeming the honour of 'a generation that came out of the Resistance' (p. 302). Similar satisfaction was yielded from the soldiers' testimonies that were published in the June 1961 edition of *Esprit* in the dossier 'Soldats et citoyens' in the wake of the Generals' putsch in April 1961, which failed to overthrow President de Gaulle to safeguard French Algeria. A consistent theme in those accounts was the fidelity of conscripts to the French republican tradition and the spirit of the Resistance in refusing to heed the call of pseudo-fascist conspiring officers. In this view, the conscripts had tipped the scales back in favour of the best traditions of the French army, rather than the institution that was increasingly perceived as less the guarantee and

embodiment of the French Republic – indeed, comparable to the school as a production line for Republican Citizenry – than its foremost liability.

The second crisis that was consistently flagged up in testimonies as particularly disturbing over and above the dirty war in Algeria was its effect on a generation of French youth serving there.^{viii} Indeed, given the sheer number of conscripts passing through the French army it was not a crisis that could be contained within that institution. ‘There is currently in Algeria a vast enterprise of dehumanisation of French youth’, Georges Mattéï (1957) claimed (p. 159). A dominant narrative pitched well-meaning young conscripts or ordinary soldiers corrupted by hardened career officers and violent paratroopers. The fact that the latter were untainted by the Vichy regime, having been established by the Free French in London (Talbot, 1976: 70), highlights the gravity of fascist analogies in the contestation of their exalted credentials. The sentiment was perhaps most powerfully put by Mattéï (1957). Reporting in *Les Temps modernes* on the apprenticeship in racism as a reflex and the omnipotence of force, he noted that ‘the young men who are fighting today in Algeria are 20 years old; they will all do 18 months in the French army. What are we making of this generation in this breeding ground that is Algeria today? We are paving the ground for the Nazification of my comrades’ (p. 159).

Yet, the attempt to jump-start French imaginations by emphasising the fate of loved ones fighting in Algeria itself depended on a certain breakdown in imagination. To the extent that the victimhood of young French soldiers was narrated, empathy or identification with the suffering of the indigenous Algerian population at the hands of the French army tended to recede. Certainly, it was invoked and roundly denounced. But there is a sense in which its overshadowing purpose in this context was to provide illustration of what was becoming of previously model citizen French soldiers and, by extension, of the French Republic itself.^{ix}

An open letter from Jacques Pucheu (1958) (whose testimony we looked at above) to Resistance hero and Minister for Information, André Malraux, was an important counter-example. He challenged those whose credentials as Resisters in the Second World War were such that their positions on the ongoing conflict carried considerable weight. The immediate context for the intervention was Malraux's public announcement in June 1958 that torture has ceased to be practised in Algeria, with the implication that, since the French military had cleaned up its act, ongoing pacification was legitimate. Pucheu invoked Malraux's anti-fascist and Resistance pedigree, but suggested that they had been forgotten in his position on Algeria. In this way, Pucheu announced his intention to remind Malraux of his own formative commitments by invoking the imaginative capacity to grasp the Other:

an atrocious passion, a passion that you know well, a passion against which you fought for twenty years and is called fascism: this refusal to see the other, to see hope, light. This passion which says "I don't want to see this other, he is too ugly, too dirty. If he doesn't want to be in my image I will do away with him!" This passion which refuses to recognise the other who exists, this other other who asks himself what to do so that you know he exists as well, this other who asks *that first* and not to be given schools in the interior; he wants those after (pp. 302–303).

The rhetorical use of fascism here was open to critique as divorced from a precise historical referent, and certainly did not correspond to the vaunted image of the modernisation plan as an innovative, cutting-edge aspect of counter-insurgency, to which he here alluded (Feichtinger and Malinowski, 2012; Peterson, 2015). For all that, it is an illuminating example of the perceived stakes and the passion generated by the drearily decreasing imaginative powers of a Resistance generation that should have known far better.

The third level of crisis was manifested in testimonies' use of analogies and comparisons with Vichy and fascism to stress the claim that France itself was degenerating. These accounts suggested an idea of degenerating French youth in Algeria as a synecdoche –

that is, the part representing the whole – for the French Republic.^x Indeed, Domenach's caution in his review of Servan-Schreiber that 'the destiny of the nation is being played out there' implied far more than the future juridical status of France's Algerian *départements*. This imaginative association of synecdoche informed Sartre's review of *Des Rappelés témoignent* – a collection of testimonies by Christians, chaplains and priests serving in Algeria, published by the Comité de résistance spirituelle in 1957. In 'You Are Wonderful', published in the May edition of *Les Temps modernes* that year, Sartre (2006) referred to the matter-of-fact accounts of atrocities committed by French soldiers by mobilising the memory of the Second World War: 'I feel I must strongly recommend this brochure to all those who are not yet familiar with it, and I would like all French people to read it. The fact is that we are ill, very ill.' (p. 64). In this view, it was simply not plausible to pretend that what French youth did in Algeria, as documented in *Des Rappelés témoignent* was unrepresentative of and detachable from France and French society.

There were certain weaknesses in this figurative invocation of the soldier as representative of the French Republic which caution us against overstating how amenable symbolic resources of memory are to calculated employment. The issue here is the extent to which the French conscript was commonly thought of as fundamentally innocent.^{xi} This was both derived from his compulsion to fight, and from the common understanding, as we will see below, that conscripts did indeed commit atrocities, but usually were considered to have arrived pure and been subsequently perverted by the military culture, and especially by the influence of career officers. If French conscripts both carried this mark of innocence and were conceptualised as a synecdoche of the French nation, the secondary implication was that the French nation itself was at bottom innocent. Atrocities, crimes or 'excesses' carried out in its name were a priori detachable as a negation of France, and it is no coincidence that career soldiers, the OAS terrorist group, or even the *pieds noirs* community as a whole were attacked

in precisely these terms (Evans, 1997). Indeed, Talbot (1976) notes how invoking the memory of Nazis or fascists had precisely the effect of salving French national consciousness (pp. 78–79), at the same time indicating how swiftly actors in the conflict could be disqualified as irredeemably un-French (C.f. Shepard, 2006).

Testimonies, Military Culture, and the Emergence of the Memory of Complicity

One attraction of the published testimonies for the editorial staff of *Les temps modernes* and *Esprit* was surely their powerful representation and indictment of military culture and processes of socialisation of the army in Algeria. This reinforced the claim that the degradation of the French soldier mirrored that of the French society that he embodied, and was expressed in sufficiently arresting language and style to call into question its passivity and complicity.

Additionally, though, I argue that these aspects of the testimonies foreshadowed the trope of complicity memory that would in later decades be employed as a fundamental parameter in reworking the memory of Vichy France. The grey zone of Vichy that Rousso, and others (Burrin, 1996; Ott, 2016; Wieviorka, 2012: 141) have pointed to has involved thinking beyond heroes and villains to a broader typology of intermediate positions of complicity and compromise, including accomplices, bystanders, beneficiaries, or witnesses; thinking of good and evil less as individual characteristics than abstract properties (Hansen and Lauge, 2016); the debilitating effects of ambivalence and uncertainty; and the systemic bases of complicity in violence and oppression.

Emphasis on *foreshadowing* here is important, and requires being alert to the cardinal historiographical sins of teleology or doing history backwards (Cooper, 2005). Moreover, it

suggests Henry Rousso is hasty to argue that the result of the contestation over the use of the memory of the Resistance and collaboration during the Algerian war was that ‘people were reminded of the fact that the choice between resistance and collaboration was insufficient to capture the true complexities of the divisions that existed in France during the Occupation’. The example of these testimonies, at least, suggests that the reconceptualisation of Vichy in terms, as Rousso puts it, of ‘dirty grays’ remained unarticulated as such at the time of the Algerian War. It did not override the ‘master narrative’ of Vichy France of heroes and victims (Rousso, 1991: 75, ix; Kalter, 2016: 110). Such was the enduring centrality of the patriotic sentiment in *Esprit*’s almost triumphalist reference to the Resistance as a guiding memory in its editorial ‘Relais’ in November 1957, or Domenach’s ‘Algérie: Propositions raisonnables’ in May of the same year. Likewise, Sartre’s illustration in his commentary on *Des Rappelés* *témoignent* of complicity with reference specifically to the German, not French, people at the time of the Occupation is symptomatic.^{xiii} Furthermore, there is at best a tenuous line of descent between, say, Domenach’s invocation of the greyness of complicity and later discourse about the grey zone of Vichy, since components of memory discourse dispense with certain elements, conjoin or are articulated with others, or are even remoulded unrecognisably over time. This accommodates historian Enzo Traverso’s (2016) contention that today’s discourse about the grey zone of Vichy largely developed out of a trend of thinking defined by the rejection of anti-fascism in its mid-twentieth century configuration, of which he points to precisely *Esprit* and *Les Temps modernes* as emblematic (pp. 3, 5–6, 274).

These testimonies suggest the aptness of historian Donald Reid’s (2007) observation about Alleg’s *La Question*, which applies well to their foregrounding of collective complicity in just such ways. To borrow Reid’s words, they ‘prepared the way for the French to confront later the Vichy Syndrome accusation that, during the Occupation, the French had participated *then* in what the Germans were doing’ (p. 585). They did so in a different manner, however,

and what they lacked in the high profile of Alleg's (and Bollardi re's) account they compensated for in more extensive, albeit not unproblematic, explanations of the complex bases of complicity. Reading Alleg's account, one is thrown into a surreal world of fully-formed torturers; the testimonies in *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit* put greater emphasis how normal young Frenchmen could become torturers. Part of the power of Alleg's account is its depiction of the hellishly disorienting character of the torture centre – for instance, one does not quite know what to make of the soldiers' open anti-republicanism and fascism. Conversely, in these testimonies there is arguably a soberer quality to the way inculcation and normalisation of violence was facilitated by the systemic and situational basis of the French military in North Africa.

How were soldiers' testimonies in the two journals indicative of this emerging memory trope of complicity? Which is to ask, what explanations were proffered which would resonate in later thinking about Vichy that remained unarticulated as such here? One can identify three closely connected points: 1. The notion of it being a slippery slope for enlisted soldiers' imagination to falter to the point of it being unremarkable to enact violence; 2. The depiction of the military or military culture not simply as depraved but as stupid; and 3. Broader claims about how institutions or social formations are conducive to bad comportment by otherwise quite normal people.

In the April 1959 *Esprit*, Pierre Leulliette (1959) remarked in 'Aventures d'un parachutiste' that 'the army forms men. Yes, but for every one it forms – often without him knowing – how many are actually deformed?' (p. 562). In that vein, the testimonies frequently suggested a considerably coherent view of the socialisation and regimentation within the army that had become clear during the Algerian war. This connected in turn to the relation between imagination and violence. It was for that very reason that exposing the socialisation of troops was a key priority in many of the testimonies.

Testimonies in both journals consistently represented military regimentation as a spectrum running from discipline in the sense of an externally felt command to obey, to an internalisation of the military's values much more akin to Pierre Bourdieu's conception of habitus, in which the institutional culture and dispositions are naturalised to a much greater degree. This ran parallel to a perceived distinction between, at one end, well-meaning, often naive, fresh young conscripts, and, at the other end, hardened careerist officers and those conscripts who had been moulded in their image over the course of their military service.

Crucially, that shift on the scale implied a dulling, even deadening, of the imagination, particularly in the sense that David Graeber (2015) terms 'imaginative identification'. By this he means the interpretative labour, the continual work of trying to understand the Other. This debilitation of imagination in turn connected to the profoundly entrenched culture of gratuitous violence that was pointed to, making *appelés* and *rappelés* complicit but primarily generated by the careerist officer core. Accordingly, the representation of the violence of the French army in these testimonies often did not so much take to task the justification of soldiers on the ground, but rather highlighted that they often did not offer – or, more precisely, they felt no need to offer – anything like a considered justification at all. Indicative of this trend were frequent references to a drunkenness on power, a sort of nonchalance or numbness towards violence rather than a defence or justification of it.

In his 1957 account of the culture of 'Gestapo-ism' in the French army in Algeria, Mattéi (1957) recalled that when he and other young Frenchmen of 20 years of age arrived, 'there was a wide gap between those young soldiers that fear, racism, desire for vengeance and the myth of the "fighter" maintained by Captain B... had transformed into true soldiers, and the rest of us, who hadn't yet understood what kind of breeding ground we'd been thrown into'. He described his astonishment at the inculcation of torture as a reflex, and at the experience of seeing young conscripts talking casually about torture, and the 'total lack of reserve of these

young soldiers, all younger than me, conscripted for more than a year, some for two years. I was stupefied to see how all “these brave ordinary peasants of France” were in on it. Apparently, they evolved in this atmosphere without feeling its horribleness. True soldiers. The career officers did a fine job’ (pp. 139, 145–146).

Another characteristic claim of these soldiers’ accounts was an emphasis of the slipperiness of the slope towards the thorough-going internalisation of the French army’s debased operational culture, both in terms of the proportion of conscripts who succumbed to it, and in terms of the unsettling speed with which they did so. Pucheu (1957) insisted that torture was not exceptional at all; on the contrary, it had become perfectly normalised. And just as its institutionalisation was disturbingly quick, so there was a parallel and deeper concern that permeated the soldiers’ testimonies regarding how slippery was the slope for young soldiers in terms of the internalisation and naturalisation of violence. In large part for this reason, Pucheu expressed the common sentiment that ‘the question which above all must make us reflect, and which touches me personally the most, is the moral situation of my comrades from the *contingent*’ (p. 444).

One sees equivalent concerns in Mattéi’s account (1957), as he remarked that ‘from a slap to torture was just a question of a few months’. For him, ‘the most serious thing was what had become of these young conscripts that I’d spent six months with after twelve months in the French army: true mercenaries’ (pp. 158–159). Renaux (1957) spoke of a ‘contagion’, and emphasised the contradictory correlation between the rise of racism among troops and the length of pacification being ever extended (p. 558). In “X”’s (1957) ‘Journal de Campagne’, it was noted how certain soldiers felt shame at first, but quickly became accustomed to expectations of violence (p. 161).

Concerns about the degeneration of French youth were here compounded by appeals to how quickly and how many of these young conscripts could be moulded by the institution of

the French military. This urgency accentuated the sense of crisis and moral imperative to bring the war to a close. However, the deployment of this argument again came at the cost of marginalising the sufferings of indigenous Algerians, and, again, dubiously, even if unintentionally, portraying French troops as the primary victims of the conflict. The appeal to the imagination of metropolitan opinion was itself constituted by a diminished imagination of the suffering as Algerians in their own right, rather than as a by-product of the primary problem of degenerated French youth, and by extension of the French Republic (Cf. Vidal-Naquet, 1986: 11).

Soldiers' testimonies also pointed to French army violence in North Africa in terms of the foreclosure of thought and imagination; namely, the recurrent depiction of this culture not merely as unjust or cruel, but explicitly as stupid. While individualised indictments in this vein were apparent, there was also a sense in how this was produced institutionally and systemically and was an important factor in facilitating complicity in French violence.

Such claims varied in tenor from claims as to the aimlessness or pointlessness of the war, to those that castigated its full-fledged imbecility. Renaux (1957) pointed to the Quixotism of military life, and insisted that above all the Algerian campaign was 'bloody stupidity [*idiotie*]' (pp. 557, 559). Mattéi (1958) denounced what he summed up as 'this carousel of idiocy [*bêtise*]' (p. 823). Cataloguing French army massacres and other atrocities, Robert Bonnaud (1957b) judged that, 'such means show the Pacification clearly for what it is, a tragic farce [*bouffonnerie*], a mystifying farce' (p. 585). In his account 'Rencontres en Algérie', Alain Mouriaux (1958) remarked on the ignorance characteristic of officers and rank and file alike regarding Algerian society. Young officers were particularly singled out – 'their curiosity is hopeless, their knowledge non-existent' (p. 801). Leulliette (1959) recollected the much-repeated imperative not to try to understand, the faithful and unconscious compliance with orders, the stupid inhumanity of and the imbecilic cruelty of certain comrades (pp. 563, 565,

567). Pucheu (1958) relayed the views of parachutists that if they were indeed behaving absurdly, it was because they were in an absurd situation (p. 446). Many complained about the culture of anti-intellectualism; Tahon (1958) lamenting that the stupidity of officers was increasingly intolerable (p. 2098). Paul Thibaud (1960), in his March 1960 review of books relating to the war, including soldiers' testimonies, remarked on the palpable sense of spiritual and intellectual paralysis that characterised the French military campaign. Furthermore, he underlined a distinct kind of wilful stupidity, when he referred to the phenomenon of instructors trying to codify torture and justify it functionally as a fragile barrier against reflection, which would engender responsibility (pp. 606–607).^{xiii}

However, while we need not discount totally these testimonies' account of operational stupidity, they are probably better understood as symptomatic of memory of the French left regarding the French army. While not incompatible with Branche's exposition of the logic of army torture in Algeria, it lacks the precision of her account, focussing on the obsessive requirement to extricate information, and the continual fear among French. More generally, historians of the French army in Algeria point precisely to the weight of intellectual effort and preoccupations of the French army (Peterson, 2015).

This leftist memory grew out of a mythology around the citizens' army of 1792 and subsequent suggestions of its betrayal in the suppression of the Commune and crystallized around the Dreyfus affair, in turn a key memorial reference (notably for figures like Vidal-Naquet). This foregrounded the argument that the army as an institution was apart from French society, and a possible danger to it (Gildea, 1994: 142). In the face of continuing popular celebration of the army, however, one response was to depict it as ignorant, backward-looking, hidebound – indeed, stupid. This thread continued through the popular new genre of anti-military novels in the late nineteenth century to Jean Jaurès's 1910 *L'Armée nouvelle* through to Marc Bloch's classic compendium of French military bungling in 1940 (published in 1946)

to the 1960s *tiermondisme* of a Gérard Chailiot, Pierre Naville, or Guy Debord. At this conjuncture, this tradition was conjoined to adumbrations of complicity that were located in the ambivalence of institutions.

The subtlest examples of these tended to appear in *Esprit* rather than *Les Temps modernes*. One illustrative instance was Jean Carta's (1958) 'L'Engrenage des responsabilités' in the May 1958 edition. In this chain of responsibilities in Algeria he lamented that 'in 1958 one cannot be Algerian with impunity. Nor can one be an innocent pacifier. Ambivalence [*l'équivoque*] distorts every one of our acts. Our intentions rebound on us like so many hideous caricatures. Men of good-will had been distorted into prosecuting this inhuman war as 'a cog in the repressive machine.' As for himself, he had 'woken up a torturer among torturers'. Reluctance to abandon comrades, paralysing uncertainty, and the imperative of duty all overrode proper consideration of 'the essential ambiguity of situation as oppressors' (pp. 816–817).

In 'Une guerre sans lois' in the same edition, Jacques Guérmonprez regretted that even the most apparently inoffensive act that the soldier engages in implicates him as 'a representative of colonizing force which the Algerians are fighting.' Connecting epistemological and moral grey zones, he noted that 'it's the indecisive nature, the ambivalence, the absence of clearly defined objections [...] of honest perspectives that give rise to acts of hate and violence' (Fogel and Guérmonprez, 1958: 808).

The pre-figuration of the complicity memory trope in these accounts also anticipated how the language of the grey zone or its equivalents cuts two ways. In this sense it is instructive that Domenach queried Sartre's lack of interest in the greyness of human action, since the existentialist prerogatives of *Les Temps modernes*, while well aware, as we have seen, of the issue of complicity, militated against any kind of alibi for inaction. If on the one hand, Domenach's invocation of greyness and knots of complicity allowed one to broaden out

categories of responsibility beyond clearly delineated villains, on the other it offers a means of exculpation. Sartre had referred to soldiers' testimonies to counter this 'guilty innocence', and Domenach, too, was alert to this risk. In his review (1959) of Pierre Henri Simon's 1958 testimony *Portrait d'un officier*, he noted that: 'sin is everywhere and in a way excuses everything – how many have already hidden their responsibility in the anonymity of general guilt!' (p. 217)

Conclusion

Domenach and de Beauvoir's invocations of complicity are useful prompts to reconsider how violence, imagination and memory were grappled with during the Algerian War in both *Esprit* and *Les Temps modernes*. In turn, the publication of soldiers' testimonies in these journals is particularly fertile ground for exploring these themes. Memory of the Second World War in these accounts has been examined as a rhetorical means of shocking French sensibilities about a multi-layered national crisis. This was rooted in violence that was precisely so unacceptable because of the perceived legacies, duties, and self-images bequeathed to France by its experience of German occupation. The testimonial form itself was mobilised to overcome barriers to the imaginative prerequisites of responsibility and action amongst the French public. To this end, it combined the authority of the soldier's testimony with the leverage of personal connections that linked the French public to young conscripts in Algeria.

Besides mobilising imagination through making a claim for the valuable symbolic resource of memory of the Second World War, many of these testimonies pointed to the problem of debilitated imagination as a basis for the violence they denounced. The testimonies

offered a powerful indictment of the rationalisation of violence through military socialisation and what was perceived as an institutional culture of stupidity and a frighteningly slippery slope to complicity in violence that – in a continual back and forth juxtaposition – mirrored the perceived dulling of the imagination of the metropolitan public. It is on this point that interesting angles of engagement can be found with Rousso, Reid and Kalter in terms of the degree to which this fashioned later rethinking of France's Vichy past. This article has suggested that many of these testimonies manifested the emergence of complicity memory. Or better, recognisable components of thinking about the 'grey zone' of Vichy permeated these testimonies but remained unarticulated as such. This precludes, then, any suggestion of a direct line of descent between, for instance, Domenach's pointing to grey complexity in the Algerian War and those later reconceptualisations of memory of the Second World War experience.

Nonetheless, this does suggest profitable avenues of research with regard to the origins of the emergence or re-emergence of the memory of the grey zone of Vichy. Kalter's emphasis on the importance of Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* and Robert Paxton's *Vichy France* to later receptivity to rethinking Vichy is well taken, but in turn requires understanding their own divergences, connections, and relationships with the memorialisation of these issues as they emerged during French decolonisation. A preliminary condition for such research would include guarding against thinking in terms of uninterrupted lineages, and deepening investigation into how components of memories are shed, picked up and articulated with others, and reworked over time, especially according to the vagaries of political, cultural and ideological moods.

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Notes

ⁱ See Surkis (2010) for valuable background information of de Beauvoir's and the *Les Temps modernes*' circles preoccupation with indifference rather than ignorance, and editorial strategies to shock the French public out of it.

ⁱⁱ This is not the same 'grey zone' famously coined by Primo Levi.

ⁱⁱⁱ On Mattéi and Bonnaud see Evans (1997) and Vidal-Naquet (1986), and on Steiner see Moyn, (2005).

^{iv} The title – in English in the original – was borrowed from the Labourist weekly, *Tribune* (Anon, 1957: 1884).

^v Conversely, the Algerian nationalist intellectual, Mostefa Lacheraf obtained the possibility to have his works published in *Les Temps modernes* and *Esprit* as 'studies' rather than 'testimonies' (Bessac-Vaure, 2012: 4). At stake are different strategies of mobilising distinct forms of symbolic capital, and indeed epistemic hierarchy in value accorded to the testimony of a French soldier versus an Algerian nationalist, the latter tainted with the Orientalist trope of dishonesty, duplicity, and unscrupulousness.

^{vi} In fact, Domenach himself refused to compare the crimes of the French Army in Algeria with Nazism (da Silva, 1991: 315); likewise Paul Ricoeur, also in the pages of *Esprit*.

^{vii} On debates over sexual violence in the Algerian War see Kuby (2013) and Brun and Shepard (2016).

^{viii} *Esprit*, in particular, placed considerable hopes on the student anti-war movement as part of an awakening in consciousness among youth. On the socialisation and action of youth in relation to French colonialism see Bancel et al (2003).

^{ix} C.f. Kuby (2013).

^x This argument borrows and adapts that of Sara Farris (2017) on Muslim women as the synecdoche for the European stereotype of the female immigrant as a deviation from European femininity (pp. 22-28).

^{xi} See Eldridge (2010) for a discussion of claims for innocence on the part of the post-colonial *pièdes noirs* community in France.

^{xii} See Susan Rubin Suleiman (2006) on Sartre's immediate post-war accounts of attitudes of complicity and resistance in France during the Occupation.

^{xiii} These accounts resonate with David Graeber's (2015) reflections on stupidity in his 'Dead Zones of the Imagination' (pp. 67-68).

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